

REPRESENTATION OF FEMALE HEROES IN THE FOLK STORY OF PUTROE ALOEH: A STRUCTURAL AND SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS FROM ROLAND BARTHES' PERSPECTIVE

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Abstrak

Cerita rakyat Aceh "Putroe Aloeh" menceritakan tentang nilai kepahlawanan wanita yang melagenda di salah satu provinsi Aceh, meskipun mengangkat narasi kepahlawana wanita, representasi karakter Putroe Aloeh dalam teks seringkali terabaikan dari kajian kritis. Padahal, adanya potensi ideologi patriaki terselubung dibalik penampilan heroik tersebut. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menjelaskan nilai kepahlawanan, kemandirian, peran wanita dipresentasikan dalam cerita rakyat Aceh "Putroe Aloeh", struktur naratif cerita, mengungkap denotasi, konotasi, dan mitos kepahlawanan wanita terbentuk melalui analisis semiotik Roland Barthes. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain deskriptif. Teknik pengumpulan data melalui studi dokumentasi/teks (transkrip lisan dan naskah). Teknik analisis data dalam penelitian dengan mencatat data, mengekstraksi dan mengkategorikan kajian teks secara struktural dan semiotik perspektif Roland Barthes. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa representasi kepahlawanan wanita dalam cerita rakyat Putroe Aloeh bersifat instrumental (alat bantu). Secara struktural, Putroe Aloeh berperan sebagai Donatur yang memiliki kuasa mutlak atas aset ajaib ("Kuda Terbang" dan "Pohon Pinang") dan menguji tokoh pria. Peran ini diperkuat oleh analisis semiotik yang membentuk mitos bahwa kepahlawanan Putroe Aloeh bersumber dari kekayaan dan keunikan (bukan aksi fisik), dan diwujudkan sebagai penguasa yang menetapkan negosiasi. Kesimpulannya ideologi cerita mengakui kekuasaan wanita, akan tetapi struktur naratif membatasi peran kekuatan sebagai jembatan Malem Diwa mencapai tujuannya. Dengan demikian peran aksi keberanian tertinggi berada pada tokoh laki-laki. Penelitian ini menyarankan perlunya tinjauan kritis terhadap narasi rakyat tentang tokoh wanita heroik mengidentifikasi kekuatan wanita dibingkai di dibatasi dalam literatur tradisional.

Kata Kunci: Representasi kepahlawanan wanita, cerita rakyat, putroe aloeh, struktural, dan semiotik Roland Barthes

Abstract

The Acehnese folktale "Putroe Aloeh" tells about the legendary value of female heroism in one of the provinces of Aceh, although it raises the narrative of female heroism, the representation of the character of Putroe Aloeh in the text is often overlooked from critical studies. In fact, there is a potential for hidden patriarchal ideology behind the heroic appearance. This study aims to explain the value of heroism, independence, the role of women presented in the Acehnese folktale "Putroe Aloeh", the narrative structure of the story, revealing the denotation, connotation, and myth of female heroism formed through Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis. The method used in the study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive design. Data collection techniques through documentation/text studies (oral transcripts and manuscripts). Data analysis techniques in the study by recording data, extracting and categorizing text studies structurally and semiotically from Roland Barthes' perspective. The results of the study show that the representation of female heroism in the Putroe Aloeh folktale is instrumental (a tool). Structurally, Putroe Aloeh plays the role of a Donor who has absolute power over magical assets (the "Flying Horse" and the "Areca Nut Tree") and tests male characters. This role is reinforced by a semiotic analysis that forms the myth that Putroe Aloeh's heroism stems from wealth and uniqueness (not physical actions), and is embodied as a ruler who determines negotiations. In conclusion, the ideology of the story acknowledges female power, but the narrative structure limits the role of power as a bridge for Malem Diwa to achieve her goals. Thus, the role of the highest act of courage lies with the male character. This study suggests the need for a critical review of folk narratives about heroic female figures to identify women's power as framed in a limited way in traditional literature.

Keywords: Representation of female heroism, folklore, putroe aloeh, structuralism, and roland Barthes' semiotics

1. INTRODUCTION

Folklore is a reflection of the values, outlook on life and social structure of the community of origin. The emergence of folklore is due to each country with its unique culture and history, characterized by stories that emerged and grew in society in the past (Batubara & Nurrizzati, 2020). This shows the important role of folklore in the form of totemism which is passed down from generation to generation (Maulana et al., 2023). Thus, folklore, which is oral literature that develops in the community, is unique and enjoyable for listeners, especially children.

Literary works in the form of folk tales contain moral values that are depicted in the form of characters, such as courage, a sense of responsibility, honesty, wise character, sincerity, never giving up, and so on (Baan, 2021). Besides, one of the easiest ways to learn a language is through folk tales (Agustina et al., 2023). This is because folk tales play an important role as a plot that explains the uniqueness and meaning contained in the story.

Folklore culture is very important in preserving the identity of indigenous communities. According to Redjeb et al. (2025) Unbeknownst to many, folktales have a powerful educational impact on children. Furthermore, oral folklore, a tradition that has existed since ancient times, contains cultural values and beliefs within the community (Ayu et al., 2025). This is because folklore combines two elements, oral and non-oral.

Folktales possess values that can be analyzed, such as the Acehnese folktale about the legend of Putroe Aloeh (the little princess). This Acehnese folktale provides a picture of the values of heroism, independence, and the strategic role of women in the context of traditional Acehnese culture, which can then be demystified using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. Simanungkalit et al. (2025) says that Roland Barthes' semiotic theory aims to understand the process of meaning

through the concepts of denotation, connotation, and myth, where denotation refers to the literal and explicit meaning that is universally recognized.

In addition to revealing hidden meanings, Barthes' semiotic techniques show how literary texts actively contribute to the formation and preservation of sociocultural (Mubarok et al., 2025). In addition, structural semiotics assumes that objects/signs are structures that are built on relationships between interrelated sign components (Ferdiansyah & Rumilah, 2025; Dewi & Safitri, 2025). This theory allows for the exploration of symbolic meaning in stories and their relationship to character values (Solihah et al., 2025). In this case, the role of semiotic theory can be applied to explain understanding related to folk tales (legends).

The Acehnese cultural context of the folktale "Putroe Aloeh" is not merely entertainment, but a cultural meaning or image that preserves and reflects the historical values and outlook of its people. In this context, Aceh is known as a region renowned for its strategic heritage of women, especially in the social and religious systems. Therefore, the legend of the folktale "Putroe Aloeh" is relevant in utilizing the image of Acehnese women who are independent, brave, and hold the authority to determine their path in life. This narrative acts as a cultural blueprint that is inherited, thus emphasizing the strong role of women as an integral part of Acehnese social identity. This story, in Roland Barthes' semiotics, not only reveals hidden meanings but also dissects traditional narratives in shaping and maintaining the ideology of women's empowerment in contemporary Acehnese society.

The folktale "Putroe Aloeh" conveys the meaning of a woman's strong will and authority in controlling her own destiny. This story is discussed in Roland Barthes' theory as a reference to explain the concept of myth and ideology formed through a two-level sign system

(denotation and connotation) in semiotics. In this case, the denotative narrative provides a hidden meaning (connotation) that is elevated into a myth to strengthen the ideology of women's empowerment in society. This is in accordance with what was put forward by Syamsurrijal et al. (2024) that ideology persists as long as culture exists, with connotation serving as an expression of culture. Thus, culture is demonstrated through text, and ideology through various codes embedded in the text, such as characters, settings, and perspectives. In this case, according to Hasbi et al. (2023) the author creates literary works influenced by the social environment, thus forming a social ideology.

The discussion above demonstrates the importance of explaining the female heroism contained in the Putroe Aloeh folktale. This story can be explained structurally and semiotically from Roland Barthes' perspective.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Folklore

Folk tales explain stories that grow and develop in a particular society (Sutarni & Sukardi, 2008). Folk tales are a genre of children's literature that reflects the life of the society in which the literature was born (Anafiah, 2017). Every society shares folktales to entertain, inform, and preserve its culture. Folktales are valued in both national and global cultures. Folktales are a useful tool for understanding and fostering cross-cultural communication (Dahal & Bhatta, 2025). It can be concluded that folklore is an oral cultural heritage of society that functions as a medium of entertainment, a source of information, a reflection of life, preservation of cultural values and a tool for communication and cross-cultural understanding.

Roland Barthes' Semiotic Theory

The word "semiotics" comes from "the science of signs." Semiology is another term with the same meaning as semiotics. The Greek term

"sama," which has the connotation of the interpretation of signs, is the origin of both semiology and semiotics (Anwar et al., 2022). Roland Barthes explained that semiotics is a key field focused on how humans understand objects and provide interpretations that cannot be connected through communication. This implies that these objects follow a system of sign structures, in addition to carrying or interpreting information (Wijayanto & Iswari, 2021). Furthermore, denotation, which refers to the literal and primary meaning of a sign, phrase, or image, is the first level of signification (meaning) in Barthes's semiology.

Denotation is the fundamental and objective level of meaning usually described in dictionaries. In contrast, the secondary, cultural, or symbolic meaning of a sign, word, or image is represented by its connotation (Khoerunisa, 2024). The same power and brightness that have given his insights into so many aspects of culture, language, art, and society are still present in Barthes's writing today (Hatam et al., 2021).

3. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive analytical design. The qualitative approach was chosen to deeply interpret the implied meanings in narrative text (Sugiyono, 2018). Meanwhile, descriptive design aims to describe the representation systematically (Arikunto, 2017). The focus of the research is to reveal the system of meaning and ideology of female heroism in the Acehese folk tale "Putroe Aloeh" from Southwest Aceh.

The data collection technique used was textual study (documentation study). The primary data source was the text of the folktale "Putroe Aloeh" (a verified manuscript or oral transcript), selected based on criteria of authenticity and relevance to Acehese culture. The research procedure included intensive reading and narrative note-taking.

The data analysis technique was carried out in two stages, namely; (a) structural analysis; dissecting narrative elements (plot, characters and setting) as an initial reading of the units of meaning, and (b) Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis; namely structural results as a basis for identifying denotations, connotations and myths.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the documentation study, the following are several explanations related to the representation of female heroism from a structural and semiotic perspective by Roland Barthes in the Putroe Aloeh folk tale.

Structural Analysis of the Folktale Putroe Aloeh

This structural analysis aims to examine the narrative elements and main characters. The main character in the story is Putroe Aloeh, who forms the character representation in the folktale. The story is based on Putroe Aloeh's goodness.

This folktale originates from Permai Village at the foot of the Southwest Mountains, Abdya. The central character or person who plays an important role in the story is Teungku Malem Diwa (a pious man who longs for his heavenly wife). Teungku Malem Diwa's wife is one of the seven heavenly princesses named Putroe Bungsu. In this story, the main conflict is caused by Malem Diwa's longing for his wife, which triggers the need for a vehicle (a flying horse). However, this flying horse is only owned by Putroe Aloeh. The main theme is related to the sacrifices or requirements that Teungku Malem Diwa must fulfill to achieve his desire to have a vehicle to heaven.

From the narrative structure of the story, Putroe Aloeh is essentially a donor (task giver). Putroe Aloeh has two important objects, essentially needed by the main character (Teungku Malem Diwa): a flying horse and a magical areca nut tree as a requirement to obtain the flying horse. In this story, Putroe Aloeh sets

two requirements for Teungku Malem Diwa as follows:

"If you can get me those 3 betel nuts, then you can marry me and take my flying horse". (Putroe Aloeh)

At that time, Malem Diwa agreed to Putroe Aloeh's requirements.

"OK, but while I'm doing the job, you can't see me". (Teungku Malem Diwa).

From this folktale, a structural analysis can be seen in Teungku Malem Diwa's ability to fulfill Putroe Aloeh's difficult and dangerous requirements. Malem Diwa's struggle to retrieve a betel nut guarded by a snake and a kala. Putroe Aloeh acts as the one who tests Malem Diwa's suitability for the horse. In this case, Malem Diwa is not a passive party who needs help without making any effort.

Conflict and resolution are the mapping of the structure of heroic action. In this story, heroism does not only lie in Putroe Aloeh, but the main conflict lies in Malem Diwa's attempt to obtain a horse. Therefore, Malem Diwa overcomes challenges such as defeating the guardian of the magical tree. The trigger for action in this story is Malem Diwa's desire. The challenging action is carried out by Malem Diwa's pet, the squirrel. Meanwhile, the resolution is Putroe Aloeh who sincerely gives up the flying horse and marries Malem Diwa. The structural resolution lies in Putroe Aloeh's sacrifice for the success of Malem Diwa.

The consequence of Putroe Aloeh's sacrifice in this story is that after Malem Diwa's wish is fulfilled, Putroe Aloeh is left on Earth. Meanwhile, Malem Diwa continues his journey to heaven to meet his first wife. The dramatic consequence in this story is the magical areca nut tree falling as a topographical marker. Structurally, the power and uniqueness of Putroe Aloeh, the areca nut tree, must end so that the narrative of this story achieves its goal regarding the origin of the name of the village "Alue Sungai Pinang". In line with the opinion expressed by

Andrian (2018) The Putroe Aloeh areca nut tree fell after losing its fruit. Its trunk stretched along the Alue River to Kuala Puloe Kayee, giving rise to the name Alue Sungai Pinang.

Roland Barthes' Semiotic Analysis of the Representation of Female Heroism

Semiotic analysis aims to interpret the signs associated with Putroe Aloeh through three levels of Roland Barthes' theory. The following is an explanation of the semiotic theory contained in Acehese folklore.

Denotation of Female Heroism in the Story Text Putroe Aloeh

In this folktale, Putroe Aloeh, who plays the role of a female hero, possesses a "Flying Horse." This demonstrates that Putroe Aloeh is a powerful individual, possessing unique wealth compared to other women.

Furthermore, the wealth and wonders of Putroe Aloeh are reflected in the presence of "a betel nut tree bearing gold, silver, and diamonds." This suggests that Putroe Aloeh possesses high social status, possessing unique and difficult-to-possess wealth. However, Putroe Aloeh lives alone in a house in the "Pucoek Krueng" (upstream) area, isolated from the rest of the community.

Based on the explanation above, the denotation of Putroe Aloeh's heroism in the story above is the power caused by the possession of rare and unique treasures. This is seen in the presence of the "Flying Horse" and the areca nut tree bearing gold, silver, and diamonds. Therefore, Putroe Aloeh literally represents an individual with absolute authority and high social status.

Connotations and Cultural Meanings of the Heroism of the Women of Putroe Aloeh

The connotation of the Putroe Aloeh folktale is seen in its location, which is different from other communities. Putroe Aloeh lives upstream in a river. However, behind its remote location,

Putroe Aloeh possesses special qualities or uniqueness, such as sacred powers that no one else possesses.

Putroe Aloeh's actions in giving the "flying horse" and marrying Malem Diwa demonstrate that a woman's power can be possessed by a man if he can overcome her challenges. Therefore, it signifies that a man must undergo various trials to achieve maximum results or achieve his desires. In this case, a man's abilities and intelligence are also seen, not just his physical prowess.

The Formation of the Myth of Female Heroism from Roland Barthes' Perspective

Myth in Roland Barthes' perspective is a second-level communication system that functions to encode social meanings and values into something that is considered natural, organic and universal.

In the Putroe Aloeh folktale, the myth depicts a figure who helps Malem Diwa resolve his problems. In this case, Putroe Aloeh has the power to determine Malem Diwa's success or failure in undertaking challenges to achieve his desire to ascend to heaven.

The myth in this story explains the limitations of female heroism. The heroine's role in the story is that of the one who sets conditions and tests, not the one who acts directly and saves. Putroe Aloeh's power comes from supernatural powers and wealth, not physical ability or the results of war. Therefore, Putroe Aloeh's role in the story is as a regulator controlling the plot, but not the main actor in solving the problem. Thus, it can be stated that Putroe Aloeh's role is as a tool or a bridge that Malem Diwa needs to cross. Meanwhile, the role of the main actor who solves the problem remains held by men. This is in accordance with the findings of the research conducted Rajabov & Ahrorova (2023) explains that myths are considered sacred knowledge and objects of belief, while folklore is an art valued for its wisdom, not its factual truth.

Synthesis Analysis of Structural and Semiotic Results of Roland Barthes' Representation of Female Heroism

Based on the discussion above, it can be explained that structurally, Putroe Aloeh's role in the story as a donor is not the main role that acts directly. This role is also reinforced by semiotic signs that form a myth because there is a guardian to fulfill these requirements. The narrative structure in the story is seen from the courage of Malem Diwa and his squirrel. In this story, Putroe Aloeh does not need to prove his heroism in helping physically but through the power he possesses. However, by setting conditions.

The Putroe Aloeh folktale essentially serves as an ideology explaining that a woman possesses the same authority and power as a pious man. In this case, this power is achieved through the power of Putroe Aloeh, not through physical struggle. The explanation above aligns with the opinion expressed by Sya'ban et al. (2022) that as a reflection of the social environment, folk tales have very high moral and educational value for Indonesian society because they are conveyed directly orally to listeners.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that Roland Barthes' structural and semiotic analysis of the Acehnese folktale "Putroe Aloeh" explains that the representation of heroism is a tool, because its power comes from the supernatural to help the male character, Teungku Malem Diwa. Structurally, the Putroe Aloeh folktale plays the role of a donor who has absolute power over magical treasures such as the "Flying Horse" and the "Areca Nut Tree bearing gold, silver, and diamonds." Putroe Aloeh challenges Teungku Malem Diwa if he wants to use the flying horse. This role strengthens the semiotic signs of myth, where Putroe Aloeh's heroism is denoted as a power derived from wealth and uniqueness (not physical actions), and is connoted as a ruler who needs to negotiate with

the conditions given by Putroe Aloeh. Thus, the ideology in this story recognizes the power of women and the narrative structure clarifies this power as a bridge for the male character (Malem Diwa) to achieve his goals and limits the role of the highest acts of courage carried out by the male character. A weakness of this study is the interpretive nature of Barthes's semiotics, which is susceptible to subjective bias. However, this study contributes by presenting a dual analytical framework between structural and semiotic analysis that specifically reveals the role of women in Acehnese narratives, which present heroic ideology through non-physical power.

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